Centralia College alumn energizes ERA program with donation

The Centralia College Electronics, Robotics, and Automation (ERA) program was strengthened by a large donation of industrial lab equipment that has been accepted by the Centralia College Foundation. The donation will help equip the college’s ERA lab, including several mobile workstations, with state-of-the-art devices.

The donation comes from Mike Carter of Hillsboro, Ore., who owns a computer business, based in Hillsboro. Carter and his wife Cielo are Centralia High School grads and began dating while attending classes at Centralia College. They earned their Associate in Technical Arts in electronics in 1991, marrying shortly after graduation.

Carter began working at Intel in the fabrication department and later joined the computer department, but he never gave up on his hobby of buying parts to build computers. Cielo continues to work for Intel as an engineer.

What initially started as Carter’s spare-time interest buying and selling computer equipment has become a thriving business, Surplus Gizmos, housed in an 8,800-square-foot retail sales facility with an online auction component, served by five full-time employees.

Over the years, Carter has made numerous donations to the college. This, the largest, is estimated to be worth tens of thousands of dollars. While serving as a tax deduction through the foundation, the gift has even greater value to ERA students.

“The students are excited to be using the professional-grade equipment,” Calvin Taylor, ERA professor, said. “I recently saw the same equipment in the new electronics department at WSU-Vancouver.” The donation greatly enhances the education of ERA students by letting them use resources, including testing tools, that are in use throughout the industry.

The mobile workstations allow projects to move from classroom to classroom without having to dismantle the project beforehand, according to David Peterson, ERA adjunct instructor. “We are already using them for a fiber optics project assisting the Boy Scouts with their Pinewood Derby,” he said.

“Whenever Mike acquires equipment that he doesn’t need, or has too much of, he contacts the college,” Taylor said. “Mike has been very generous with his donations to the electronics department.”

“I’ve received much over the years and it’s important for me to give back. It’s just part of how I do business,” Carter said.

Carter is impressed with the ERA program at Centralia College and its hands-on approach to instruction. “A lot of programs don’t give students the hands-on opportunities that Centralia College does,” Carter said.

“We recycle and reuse equipment when we can. It makes donating to schools a no-brainer,” Carter said.
Tove Burhen (Hodge) believes statue serves as reminder of contribution Corbet/Kemp for generations to come

Centralia College matriarchs Margaret Corbet and Katharine Kemp hold a special place in Tove Burhen's heart. Burhen (Hodge), a 1945 Centralia College graduate, credits the two as likely saviors of the college, but perhaps more importantly as two teachers who kept her enrolled in college and inspired her to go on to her teaching career.

Burhen provided $20,000 needed to complete funding for the Corbet/Kemp statue in part to thank the early college leaders and also to serve as a reminder to future students of the worth of the institution that the two kept alive.

The statue, which will cost about $100,000, is now in the hands of sculptor Jim Stafford and is expected to be completed and installed in 2014.

"The college's intent to create a statue caught my attention. (Corbet and Kemp) were my inspiration for my college studies. They worked to keep the college open when it was threatened to close," Burhen said.

The college had been open for less than 20 years and faced severe funding shortages during the Great Depression and was struggling as WWII pulled young men and women into the war effort. Burhen was one of three graduates, all women.

"With the younger male instructors in military service," Burhen said, "the remaining instructors were as good as we could have had." She said that all the instructors instilled a high ethical standard that affected all students. That standard was set by Corbet, the junior college's principal, and her close friend and fellow teacher Kemp.

Corbet and Kemp "seemed aloof at first and we were somewhat in awe of approaching them," Burhen said. But there was always compassion behind the stern exterior.

"When Miss Corbet realized that I could not pay for a second year, she gave me a work study position so I could pay tuition. By working where I could, I managed to go on to earn my bachelor's and teacher's certificate instead of stopping with one year of college," Burhen said.

The two also made sure students were successful in the classroom and active in college life.

“They expected excellence in their classes,” Burhen said. Outside of the classroom the few college students, with guidance from Kemp and Corbet, regularly published a school paper, ran the office, and produced a yearbook with snapshots developed in a chemistry classroom that served as a darkroom. Corbet and Kemp made sure that the three graduating ladies had the spring picnic, a formal Mothers' Tea and a memorable graduation ceremony. Tradition was maintained.

"I liked them both very much and wanted to contribute to their statue. They saved Centralia College from closure. If not for them getting instructors and making everything happen, the college might not be open now," Burhen said. All five of her children graduated from Centralia College and three of her grandchildren attend Centralia College today. "The college is such an important part of the community!" Burhen said.

After graduating from Centralia College, Burhen finished her next three years at the University of Washington, majoring in Spanish and minoring in English, and received her teaching certificate. At that time students had to complete a fifth year before they could go on to teach.

She was hired to teach Spanish and English at Ferndale, west of Bellingham, and when she got there she was also asked to teach girls' physical education. She also started directing high school plays and that became her real hobby. She went on to teach in Rochester, Centralia and Maple Lane School in Grand Mound.

While living in Centralia she directed plays for the Evergreen Playhouse. Because of her love for theatre, even at the age of 87, Burhen continues to direct plays for the Senior Center in Duvall, where she now lives.
Laura Dowling has a passion for nature’s beauty and a gift for design. First Lady Michelle Obama appointed Dowling in 2009 as the White House chief floral designer. She is also the Centralia College 2013 Distinguished Alumnus Award recipient.

Dowling, 52, is the college’s 35th Distinguished Alumnus Award recipient and will be honored during June 14 commencement day ceremonies.

“I am really honored by this award. I had such a wonderful experience at Centralia College, participating in academic, theatrical and athletic pursuits. It is amazing and humbling to join such a distinguished group,” said Dowling.

As the nation’s top floral designer, Dowling is responsible for the creation of a signature White House floral style. Her goal is to transcend fads and trends to articulate an original style that includes classic and modern elements.

On a daily basis she manages, plans, and implements décor and flowers for a broad range of White House events, including state dinners, parties, receptions as well as the White House Christmas. Her work includes creating flower arrangements for the White House state rooms, East and West Wing offices, and the private residences.

It is worth noting that Dowling trained for a far different world.

She is a 1979 Centralia College graduate who majored in social sciences with a goal of pre-law education. She went on to the University of Washington, earned an undergraduate degree in political science and Master of Public Administration. She was selected for a graduate public policy internship in the U.S. Senate based on a statewide competition among graduate students. She was on track for a career in government service.

With that career on its ascendency, Dowling became the Development and Congressional Relations officer for the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars where she coordinated fundraising and lobbying efforts for this international affairs think tank located within the Smithsonian Institution. She held that position from 1985 until 1998. From 1999 – 2009, she was Senior Manager of Strategic Communications at The Nature Conservancy, the world’s largest environmental non-profit agency.

In 2000, Dowling took her first trip to Paris and spent a lot of time studying French floral arrangements. It was an epiphany and Plan B began to gain a foothold in her life’s ambition. She was hooked on floral artistry.

That same year Dowling launched a part-time independent design company in her home-based studio, focusing on flowers for weddings, parties, and events. She created floral concepts and décor for private, corporate and official government events in Washington, D.C.

When the former White House floral designer retired, Dowling applied for the position and earned the job.

“I have always had a passion for flowers and an interest in design. My current position allows me to combine all of my professional experiences and education with my artistic passion. It is an absolute pleasure to come to work each day and to work in such an inspirational setting – the White House, the people’s house – creating floral décor for an amazing array of official events and everyday activities.
Chase Grimmett, a Running Start student who was a top graduate in Rochester High School’s 2012 senior class, carries a clear vision of what he wants out of life. As a high school student he played varsity football, basketball, and baseball and had the potential of attending several universities on scholarships based on his physical skills. But it is academics that hold his passion and what he believes is his best career option. He is now a second-year Centralia College student with plans to work in marine biology.

Grimmett will attend Western Washington State University to study marine biology next fall with plans to focus on coral reef ecology.

Marine biology is the perfect career for Grimmett: he is passionate about the environment, and is an advanced certified scuba diver with deep water and cave dives in Hawaii and the Pacific Northwest to his credit.

“Finishing my associate degree at Centralia College makes a lot more sense financially. Besides, the college has the advanced science classes I need for my degree in marine biology. And the Environmental Science Department has amazing instructors who are experts in their fields,” Grimmett said. “The support I’ve received from the faculty has been incredible, they have really helped guide me in the direction I need for my degree.”

In fact, Grimmett was accepted and offered partial scholarships to attend Oregon State University, University of Oregon, and Western Washington University. Grimmett puts it this way, “The scholarships would have only paid for about 40 percent of my tuition; my family would have had to come up with the rest. That’s an incredible amount of money, I don’t want my family to go into debt for my education.” With two scholarships from the Centralia College Foundation to help pay the way, his overall college costs will be much more manageable.

Grimmett also has his family to thank for his recognition of the importance of education and his career direction. His mother works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department tracking endangered species, and his father is an instructor for special needs children.

In what little spare time Grimmett does have, he enjoys hiking and backpacking, and he takes lessons in Taekwondo. And he still manages to work part time. Through his hard work and dedication, coupled with a clear vision for what he wants, he is certain to realize his dreams.

TransAlta Elk hunt serves as popular funding source for Sherwood Memorial Scholarship

The highly successful Dave Sherwood Memorial Scholarship elk hunt raffle is again in high gear offering a special hunting opportunity for a lucky hunter.

A $25 ticket, now on sale, gives hunters a chance to win the elk hunt on TransAlta’s Centralia mine lands in November. The winner is responsible for buying a Washington state hunting license and tag, and will be accompanied by a TransAlta representative during the hunt.

Last year, the first for the event, the raffle brought in $13,500 for the Dave Sherwood scholarship. Steam plant mechanic Bill Johnson, the winning ticket holder, bagged a 5x6 bull elk.

Sherwood was a respected Outside Resource Manager at the Centralia plant. He passed away in a tragic hunting accident in 2011. His fellow employees suggested the elk hunting opportunity on TransAlta-owned property to honor their colleague.

“Being the lucky winner of the Dave Sherwood Memorial Scholarship Elk Hunt, I would like to thank TransAlta for such a neat opportunity in being able to harvest a great bull,” Johnson wrote on his Facebook page, adding he also thanked Mine Senior Environmental Specialist Tim LeDuc for his assistance in the hunt. “Although I did not know Dave Sherwood, I do know we had something in common. We both loved to hunt elk. God bless.”

Tickets can be purchased by cash or check through TransAlta Office, Centralia; College Foundation Office, Centralia; Joe’s Outdoor Sports Shop, Lewis County Mall; Ethel Market, Ethel; J & S Gun Shop, Lacey; Book ‘n Brush, Chehalis; Stanley’s Store, Onalaska; Four Corners Market, Castle Rock; Salkum Market, Salkum; Fischer’s Shopping Center, Randle; Tri-Mountain Sports, Morton; Blanton’s Market, Packwood; Hedden’s Pharmacy, Tenino; The Gun Shop, Longview; and Grand Mound Licensing, Rochester.

Tickets may be purchased using a debit or credit card at the Hanke House at Centralia College, located at 600 Centralia College Blvd., or by calling 360.736.9391, ext. 290.
Corbet/Kemp kept the college alive, influenced its students

There is little doubt that Centralia College, in no small part, owes its existence to Margaret Corbet and Katharine Kemp. The two were largely responsible for the school’s reputation as a quality junior college with a faculty that was involved in the lives of its students.

Just as important was the fact that the two lead the efforts to keep the college operational during the fiscally lean years of the Great Depression and WWII, when enrollments dipped to precipitously low levels.

Over the combined 61 years of their service, the two wielded tremendous influence not only on education but the very lives of thousands of men and women who enrolled. Their efforts to ensure that students had a quality college experience during their first two years set the stage for what the college is today.

Gordon Aadland, long an advocate for preserving the history of the college, proposed erecting a statue honoring the two college matriarchs. Following a period of fundraising and design review, work has started on the full-size statue. The statue is being created by noted sculptor Jim Stafford, also a Centralia College alum, who also created the Reaching for the Stars statue gracing the north main entrance to Washington Hall. It is expected that an official unveiling will take place in 2014, and will be located on the northwest side of the Kirk Library, just south of the Aadland Esplanade.

Enough money has been raised to pay for the creation of the statue (see related story about Tove Burhen in this Nexus).

Corbet served until 1949, Kemp retired in 1968.

High achievers secure All-Washington status

Edward Riley and Delanie Willows, both second-year Centralia College students, were named to the 2013 Coca-Cola All-Washington Community College Academic Team and have been nominated to the 2013 All USA Today Community College Academic Team.

Both are attending Centralia College on scholarships. Students were selected based on their academic achievement, community involvement, and service to the college. An announcement on those earning All-USA Today team status is expected in April.

“These students are examples of what individuals can do when they have purpose. They each hold great promise not only for their lives but also for society in general. We are proud of what they have done and what they will do,” Dr. Jim Walton, college president, said.

Student: Delanie Willows
Age: 19
GPA: 3.9
Major: Communications

Delanie is on track to fulfill her ambition to write. She began college as a Running Start student, served as a tutor in the Writing Center, and found her passion for journalism writing for The Chronicle, the community newspaper, and The Blaze, the student newspaper. Her desire is to bring about change and innovation through effective communication to help individuals improve their lives. She loves the complexity and necessity of the written word.

Student: Edward Riley
Age: 49
GPA: 3.57
Major: Business/Marketing

Edward started college while in his mid-40s, looking for a career change. An introspective search provided grounding for the writing of a children’s book, My Monster and Me, about taming monsters many youngsters have within themselves. Now he is considering a career in writing and is studying Business/Marketing to become more of an entrepreneur. He has organized fundraising events to help renovate a local theatre, and for a local food bank.
It was a grand homecoming for Distinguished Alumnus Award recipient (2012) and international opera star Angela Meade. She gave a packed Corbet Theatre a glimpse into her immense talent while performing a benefit concert that is the beginning of the Deborah Meade Memorial Endowment.

The endowment, when fully funded, will provide scholarships to music students in honor of Angela’s mother, who succumbed to cancer in 2012.

There is currently $12,500 in the endowment.

Meade is a native of Centralia who didn’t discover opera until she was a Centralia College student. The college’s music staff encouraged her to explore opera as a career option. The fire was lit.

Meade is a rising star in the world of opera. She has won numerous awards and in 2008, was a last minute substitute in Verdi’s Emani at the New York Met. She more than got noticed: Her performance was magical and it opened the door to bookings around the world.

She has learned a great deal about life from her experiences and passes along a very important message.

“You need to follow your dreams. Explore the fields you enjoy and find your passion,” Meade said. “If you’re not being fulfilled then look around and find something that excites you. It’s important to be doing what you are passionate about.”

For information on the Deborah Meade Memorial Endowment, please contact the foundation by calling 360.736.9391, ext. 290.